

## REPRINTS

*Adore enthusiasm, the dreams of the virgin soul, and the visions of early youth, for they are a perfume of Paradise which the soul retains in issuing from the hands of its Creator.—MAZZINI*

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# Theatre-Architecture in Ancient India

By V. RAGHAVAN, B.A., (HONS.)

## II

In an article on this subject published in the November—December issue, 1931, of this journal, I spoke of the existence of well-built theatres in ancient India on the basis of evidences from Sanskrit treatises on Drama.<sup>1</sup> The kinds of theatres, the details of their dimensions, equipment etc.,—these were dealt with by me in that article, as far as can be gathered from available Sanskrit texts on *Natya Sastra*. Now I propose, similarly, to treat of theatre-architecture on the basis of evidences from Sanskrit works on the *Silpa Sastra*, which deal with the construction of the theatre along with that of other buildings.

The *Samarangana Sutradhara* of King Bhoja, a work comprehensively treating of the architecture of palaces and other buildings, of arms, air-vehicles, painting etc., describes the construction of the palace of a king in Chapter XV. While mentioning the various parts of the palace, it says that in the southern quarter of the palace is built the 'Gandharva Vesma,' where 'preksha' and 'sangita,' (drama and dance) are witnessed. Coming to painting and the decoration of the buildings, Bhoja gives in Chapter XXXIV what sort of pictures should adorn what places. He says here that the halls for 'preksha' and 'sangita' should be decorated with pictures of damsels with the dance-expression called 'mudita'—'gladdened face,' of danseuses in their skilful dances, and of women playing on the various instruments.

The *Isana Siva Guru Deva Paddhati* of Isana Guru Deva, a big work on 'sivagama,' temple-architecture, 'murti lakshana', etc., gives

<sup>1</sup>Subsequent to my writing that article I have been going through the 'Natya' literature and find that many a work describes the theatre. The *Sangita Damodara*, the *Sangita Chandra* of Abhilasha and the *Sangita Narayana* of King Narayana of Paralakimidi contain descriptions of the theatre.

a small and obscure description of the 'prekshagriha'—the place for dramatic presentation.

The *Silpa Ratna* of Sri Kumara describes in Chapter XXXIX, the various 'mantapas' within a temple, of which the 'Natya Mantapa' is one. This work devotes one section of eight verses to the construction of the 'Natya Mantapa' in the temple. The text as printed in the *Trivandrum Sanskrit Series* is corrupt, and as that of other 'silpa' works, lacks grammar. These facts add to the difficulty of releasing the information locked in the technical terms of these 'silpa' works, research work in which field has not yet advanced sufficiently. The text contains a description of the details of construction, dimensions etc., but only a little is clear. The 'Natya Mantapa' in the temple is divided into four parts. The stage proper, 'Ranga,' is square, has four pillars, and is "perfect with other requisites." In the back is the place for 'mridanga' and other instrumental accompaniment making the orchestra, 'Kutapa,' supporting the 'natya.' This place accommodating the instruments is the 'Ranga Sirsha' of Bharata. Sri Kumara says that behind this place for orchestra, "the 'Nepathya dhama,' the green room, must be constructed by one knowing the several parts of the stage." This 'Natya Mantapa' must be in the south of the temple, facing directly the God in the main sanctuary. In the end, Sri Kumara says that in a temple or in the cities for the sake of the people, or in the capital where the king lives, theatres like the above-described must be built according to 'lakshanas.' Thus though Sri Kumara mainly describes only the theatre in the temple, he mentions also the theatres of the people and of the King.

The *Narada Silpa* of Sage Narada, an unpublished 'silpa' treatise,<sup>1</sup> a manuscript copy of which is available in the Adyar Library, describes the theatres, 'Nataka Salas.' The work affects a very archaic style and consequently the interpretation becomes very difficult. To begin with, Narada divides 'Nataka Salas' into three kinds: 'Daiva,' 'Gandharva,' and 'Kshatra,' i. e., the theatre of God, of the people, and of the King. The first, 'Daiva' is to be built in a temple; 'Gandharva,' the second, where all people see dramas, is

<sup>1</sup> Subsequent to my writing this, this work has begun to be published serially in the monthly journal *Trimalai Sri Venkatesa*, Tiruppati.

to be built in such places as cities; the last, 'Kshatra' is to be built in a king's palace. And here, there is this good rule: On a 'daiva' stage should be presented 'Daivika Rasa,' i.e., 'Bhakti,' divine and religious themes; on a 'Kshatra' or king's stage, the 'Kshatra Rasa,' i.e., 'vira,' the heroic *etc.*; the cultured and the tasteful present in the 'Gandharva' or the city-theatre for all people, all the various 'Rasas.'

Narada is the only writer who has given this clear division of the theatres in ancient India. From Bharata's description of the theatre, we get only the King's and the people's theatres. But in a later context, Bharata says that dance and dramatic performances should be a feature of festivals. The art of 'Nāṭya' had for its patron, more than the king, the God in the temple of the city, town, or village. Each place had not a king but each small place also had its temple. There is a Tamil maxim which says that one should not live in a place where there is no temple. The centre of village life was the temple, which gathered its revenue and redistributed it during its annual festivals. Each place had its artists and craftsmen, to all of whom employment was given by the temple. The annual festival of the temple was a festival to the whole village and to many other neighbouring villages also. The annual festival itself was an exhibition of the artware, metal works *etc.* of the neighbouring places. The occasion of such annual festival was marked also by dramatic performances. We all know very well how the prologues to most of the Sanskrit dramas say that those dramas were staged during the festivals of certain deities of certain holy places. The puppet show, 'Bommalattam', was up to a recent time, to be seen during the festivals. The 'Bhagavatars,' i.e., the Brahmin Bharatas staged their 'Natakams' during the festivals, as for instance, the 'Prahlada Charitam' during 'Narasimha Jayanti'.<sup>1</sup> Now that this 'Natakam' and the race of the Brahmin Bharatas are

<sup>1</sup> These traditional 'Natakams' keep the art of Bharata alive. The village of Uttukkadu, six miles south of Kumbakonam, is the oldest place for this drama. It flourished in Nallur, Sulamangalam, Saliamangalam and Tepperumalkoil, all villages near to each other. It goes on still at Sulamangalam and Uttukkadu. During the Vasanta festival in the month of *Vasakha* ten such dramas are even now staged at Uttukkadu every year. Will enthusiasts of Bharata-art turn their attention to this?

almost dead, some rich temples arrange during festivals for 'Katha Kalakshepams' by the new 'Bhagavatars', the successors of the old 'Bharata Bhagavatars'. Similarly, the lower class of people, during festivals of their deities, such as the 'Droupadi Amman Utsavam,' arrange for their dramas, the 'Terukkuttus.'

Besides the various kinds of 'Natya' during these annual festivals, each temple had its 'Natya Mantapa' and its daily 'Natya' by courtezans attached to the temple. This is supremely so in the cases of the temples of Siva, who is the greatest dancer, the greatest in the pantheon of 'Natyacharyas' and who himself dances every day in the glorious evening hour. The Vaishnavite lyrics are all set to music and were intended for 'Natya.' The 'Arayars' at Srirangam, Kanchi, and Alvar Tirunagiri were master exponents of these, which they offered to their Lord. 'Natya' in the temple is very old. Kalidasa mentions in his *Megha Sandesa* the daily dance in the evening by courtezans in the temple of Mahakala in Ujjain. Kalhana speaks of such daily dance by courtezans in temples in some other part of India in his *Rajatarangini*. Even now the evidences of those times are lingering in our temples in some useless specimens of these 'servants of the Lord.' Without making possible those conditions which will again make them the repositories and exponents of the beautiful art of 'Natya,' other social reform issues have set themselves to sweep out the race. Reformation often times is so lacking in imagination; it produces cultural anæmia. The temple was thus the greatest patron of 'Natya,' next to the palace. It is said that a very great personality of to-day hailing from the North characteristically delivered himself of a truth that nothing would flourish under the shadow of the South Indian temple towers. It is in the shade of the lofty towers that everything flourished, the towers which by their height, not only appear to, but really also dominate the whole village life. Withdrawal from their nestling shade has been the cause of life steadily becoming more and more insipid.

So each temple had its 'Natya Mantapa.' The 'Kuttambalam' is a feature of all temples. It is this that Sri Kumara describes in his *Silpa Ratna* and the *Isana Paddhati* briefly speaks of.

The *Narada Silpa* just mentions the 'Daiva,' this temple stage, and says that it shall be of the form of a 'Mantapa' and passes over it. Naturally the 'Natya Mantapa' in the temple was not, and could not have been, so perfect and elaborately built as the theatres of the King or of the people.

The 'Kshatra' or the King's theatre also is not fully described by Narada. He says that it is constructed in the palace in the form of halls with 'Anganas' or courts. We can supply the description of 'Daiva' from Sri Kumara. So also we can supply the description of the 'Kshatra' from the works surveyed by me in the last article. The *Natya Sastra* of Bharata, the *Bhavaprakasa* of Saradatanaya etc., describe the 'Kshatra' theatre of the palace. All throughout the Sanskrit 'Kavya' and Drama literature we can see this theatre in the King's palace. The *Ramayana* says that one of the losses to the country resulting from its being without a king is that 'Utsavas' and 'Samajas,' festivities and gatherings of art-lovers in which feature joyous 'Natas' and 'Nartakas' which are necessary for the nourishment of the country, do not flourish.<sup>1</sup> It is part of the 'Rajadharma' that the king should patronise 'Natya,' and that the greatest gift he can make is the arranging of dramatic performances. Bharata says in his 'Natya Sastra' in chapter XXXVI: "Among the 'Dharmas' of a king, great merit is sung of this drama. Of all 'Danas,' gifts, this gift of drama is the greatest."<sup>2</sup>

Coming to the theatre of the public, the 'Gandharva,' it is this that Narada describes at great length in his 'Silpa' work. The ancient Indian led a rich life. Life was a supreme art for him, and all the fine arts helped the greatest art of his, namely, life. This is true not only of the finer among those whom Vatsyayana calls as 'Nagarakas' but of all cultured people in general. The elite of the city had their own public places to meet and enjoy 'Natya and Sangita.' There were theatres in the city, which Sri Kumara calls as 'Manushya' and Narada as 'Gandharva.' And we shall

<sup>1</sup> Narajake janapade prahrishta neta nartakah.  
Utsavascha samajascha vardhante rashtra vardhanah.||

*Ramayana* Ay. Kanda 15.

<sup>2</sup> Nripadharmeshu sarveshu keertyate asya mahaphalam |  
Prekshaneeya pradanam tu sarvadaneshu poojyate.||

see presently, besides these regular theatres in the city, there were other places in the city more or less like theatres where on many occasions, citizens gathered to enjoy 'Natya.'

As remarked above, *Narada Silpa* is written in an affected archaic style, as a result of which all the valuable details given in it are rendered obscure. The ground is first made into three parts. The portion at the centre is made into the stage proper. Behind the line marked by the curtain, is the third section, which should be built so as to have many rooms, with space enough to place many things. This portion, therefore, was used for keeping the articles of stage equipment and served also as the green-room. The first section of the ground is made into the audience hall. Nearest to the stage are to be arranged seats for the Brahmins; behind them for the Kshatriyas and so on. The audience hall has storeys with large windows for ventilation and here sit the women-spectators. Narada further seems to say that the stage itself has three or five 'Bhaumas,' that is, it is not even everywhere but of three or five levels. Near the entrance gate and outside the audience hall are several special chambers, a circular hall and rows of beautiful seats for taking rest. This portion of the house perhaps represented a fourth and further section where spectators spent their time before or after the play or at other times when there was no play. Narada speaks of other details also, such as gates, pillars, beams etc. In the end he comes to the decoration of the theatre and says that in the top along the turret, beautiful forms of Gandharvas must be carved. The top of the second section containing the stage proper has an upper room, big or small, which is richly decorated with carved birds and pictures and which ends like a 'Mantapa' in a long 'Sikhara' or 'Stupi.'

The *Prasada Lakshana* of Vasudeva Suri is perhaps the biggest work on 'Silpa Sastra.' It has an elaborate commentary by one Yagna Dikshita. The work is unpublished and a manuscript copy of it is available in the Adyar Library. The work describes, giving all structural details, many kinds of mansions, public and private, 'samanya' and 'visesha.' The public buildings are those where citizens meet and celebrate festivals such as the 'Vasantotsava.' There are theatrical buildings among these, where during the festivals

the citizens enjoy 'Natya' performed by courtezans. The private buildings are the palaces and the houses of rich citizens and these also contain special apartments for witnessing 'Natya.' Of these we shall speak now.

The most important of the public buildings where citizens meet during festive occasions to see 'Natya' is the 'Saradaprasada.' The commentator here points out that the 'Saradaprasada' is of two kinds, one intended for Brahmins to meet for studies, debates and other literary activities, 'Kavya Sastra Goshtis,' and the other for the Kshatriyas and Vaisyas for 'Sangitaka,' i.e., for witnessing dance and drama. The temple of Sarasvati built by King Bhoja where he held his literary court was perhaps the first kind of 'Saradaprasada.' The commentator adds that sometimes marriages are celebrated in the 'Saradaprasada' and that it is to suit such celebrations that the text also gives the 'Saradaprasada' additional apartments at the back for feasting large numbers of people. The main purpose for which the 'Saradaprasada' was intended, was, however, witnessing dance during marriages or other occasions like Spring festivities.

Vasudeva Suri describes it as the eighth kind of mansion in his *Prasada Lakshana*. He says that it shall be of a square or other shape. Each building, the text says, has many varieties on account of size. In a village, 'grama,' the building is small; in a town 'pattana,' the same building should be slightly bigger; in a city, 'nagara,' it is still bigger; it is still bigger in size in the capital 'rajadhani.' According to this general rule, Vasudeva gives two main kinds of 'Saradaprasada,' the smaller one in a village and the bigger one in a city. Thus each village also had its 'Saradaprasada'. The smaller had two gates, four adjoining rooms, and three storeys and the bigger in the city had four gates, eight adjoining rooms and five storeys. The whole house had three courts, the middle containing the stage. It was a big 'Chatvara' and was called the 'Rangika Sala.' Behind it were several rooms for other purposes. In the central hall containing the stage were seats arranged in galleries, having steps to ascend at the corners. The commentator says that according to the size, the number of pillars in this hall having the stage is eight, twelve or sixteen; that the hall shall be very spacious and beautified with many pictures.



This central hall containing the stage was high and rose up like a 'Mantapa' with dome and other features like 'Stupa' and 'Kalasa' at the top to give beauty. Further this central hall with the stage, was surrounded by four or eight rooms which were connected by a running 'Angana' and above these rooms, there were three or five storeys. These storeys also accommodated spectators, perhaps the women.

The 'Sarasvati Mandira' mentioned in the *Kama Sutas* by Vatsyayana seems to be different from the above-described 'Sarada prasada' though both are similar in that they are dedicated to Sarasvati and to 'Natya.' The difference is that Vatsyayana's 'Sarasvati Mandira' resembles very much the temple. In it is the Goddess of Learning and Arts, Sarasvati. The day sanctified by her name is the 'Panchami,' the fifth day after the new or full moon. Such days are called the 'Prajnata' days. On every 'Panchami' the cultured men of the city repair in a body to the temple of Sarasvati, for Sarasvati is the greatest deity of the 'Nagarakas' who are devoted to learning and the Arts. This temple of Sarasvati is a feature of all cities. The chief among the citizens or some other authority appoints a certain number of artists called 'Niyuktas,' has them permanently paid in the 'Sarasvati Mandira' of his city, to entertain the 'Nagarakas' with 'Natya' on the day of their meeting, namely, the 'Panchami.' Sometimes a touring party of 'Natya'—artists, the visitors, 'Agantukas' arrive. They belong to some other city and are 'Niyuktas' in the 'Sarasvati Mandira' of that city. When these visitors arrive it is the duty of 'Nagarakas' to receive them, arrange for their performance in the local 'Sarasvati Mandira' and honour them with presents. Thus this 'Sarasvati Mandira' which we see from the *Kama Sutra* as a feature of all 'Nagaras,' cities, was mainly intended for fortnightly presentation of 'Natya' and hence had as the main part, a stage intended for that purpose.

Coming again to the work called *Prasada Lakshana*: It describes other public and private buildings, built for witnessing 'Natya.' The nineteenth mansion called the 'Malika Prasada' is one such public building. The Brahmins do not frequent this. The Kshatriyas meet here during marriages and festival occasions to see

'Natya' performed by courtezans. The stage is in the central hall. By its side and also in the front of the house are, on the whole, four halls and further, behind the stage-hall, there are other apartments for other purposes.

The twenty-second 'prasada' called the 'Matra Parasada' is also for seeing 'Abhinaya Vidya.' The text says that this mansion has a big hall for the presentation of 'Abhinaya' and that the whole house has two or three storeys with stairs at the corners. It is said that sometimes debates are also carried on in this mansion. The commentary says that this 'Matra Prasada' is mainly for seeing dances by courtezans and is also used for testing students and scholars in debates. The building, the commentator says, should be on an elevation of six 'hastas', nine feet, above the ground, with four high gates on the four sides, or on the whole twelve gates, four to each of the three sides. The central hall containing the stage-platform is built like a 'Mantapa.'

The thirty-fourth public mansion called the 'Visvakarma Bhavana' is another such building. Of it the commentator says that it is a public mansion where Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, and Sudras, and other mixed castes—all men in general—meet during auspicious and beautiful occasions such as Spring to hear religious expositions, or music, or to see the presentation of 'Lasya' and 'Abhinaya' by courtezans, or to witness magic, 'Indrajala' or to hear expositions of puranic 'Kathas.'

The thirty-fifth mansion called 'Maya Bhavana' is a square building and is for all men to meet during Spring and on other festive occasions for enjoying music and dance. Thus the public buildings for theatrical performances are five,—the 'Saradaprasada,' the 'Malikaprasada,' the 'Matra Prasada,' the 'Visvakarma Bhavana,' and the 'Maya Bhavana.'

Coming to the 'Visesha Prasadas,' private mansions, the fifteenth mansion described by Vasudeva Suri called the 'Iravata Prasada' is a big palace. Measurements etc., for this palace are given. This building has in it halls for music, dance and drama. These halls occupy the third court. Many other private 'prasadas' like this, of kings as well as of rich men, are said to contain separate halls for the witnessing of 'Natya.'

Thus in ancient India, there were well-planned and well-built theatres in the cities where people gathered, and in the palace where the king witnessed drama and dance with his retinue. These theatres are most elaborately and completely described by Bharata only among writers on the subject. The theatres were of varying sizes and shapes. From Saradatanaya's *Bhavaprakasa* we see that the 'Vritta' or circular which is the same as the semi-circular or horse-shoe theatre that is considered as the best, was also available in ancient India. Besides these, there were the theatres of temples, which were naturally not very elaborately designed as the palace theatre or the city theatre of the citizens. In addition to these there were the 'Saradaprasada' and the 'Sarasvati Mandira' in each city, as also the many other mansions which provided stages and were constructed somewhat like theatres, where on many occasions the citizens enjoyed drama and dance. The cultured ancient Indian had so much of the art of 'Natya' dance, drama, and music in his life, that besides the heavy programmes he had in regular theatres, he enjoyed often smaller programmes of drama and dance on all festive occasions in the public mansions of the city, or, if rich, in his own private mansion. These were the many places where, in ancient India, dramas were staged and the art of 'Abhinaya' presented.

# Theatre-Architecture in Ancient India

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## III

### THE EVIDENCE OF TAMIL LITERATURE

The sources of information on the subject of theatre-architecture in ancient India in Tamil are of two kinds: Kavya (Poetry), and Sastra (Poetics or Dramaturgy). Of the former class, the *Silappadikaram* of Ilankovadikal, a dramatic composition (Nataka Kavya), is the only Kavya which helps us largely in getting glimpses of the nature of the stage or theatre in times past.

Chapter III of this dramatic poem, *Silappadikaram*, is called *Arangettrukkadai*, i.e., the *gatha* describing the first dance performance presented for the approval of the king and the learned men. The place is the famous Kaverippumpattinam, the place of Kovalan, the hero of the poem. Madhavi, a courtesan of that city, gives her maiden dance performance before the king who has invited the chief citizens, *Perunkudihal*, of whom Kovalan is one. The chapter opens with a description of Madhavi and then her troupe, consisting of a very learned natyacharya or *Nattuvan* (*Adal Asiriyar*), a sangitacharya or musician (*Isai Asiriyar*), the player on the drum, the mardangika (*Tannumai Asiriyar*), and an accompanying orchestra of a flutist and a vainika, (*Kuzhalon* and *Yaz Asiriyar*). The accompaniment at that time thus consisted of a vocal musician, a drum-player, a flutist, and a vainika. This corresponds to what Bharata has given, there being in his *Natya*, besides the vocal songster, three orchestras, the *Avanaddha Kutapa* (drums), the *Sushirakutapa* (flutes) and the *Tata Kutapa* (stringed instruments). It is only recently that

conditions have changed. We can even now see some *Tevaram Goshthi*, singers of Tevarams, having the flute accompaniment. The *Mukha Veena* was accompaniment for some time in the *Sadir* performances, but soon the clarionet displaced it. The accompaniment of the stringed orchestra of the *Veenas*, the *Tata Kutapa*, disappeared long ago. Now a clarionet, a *Mridanga*, and a vocal songster support the *Natya* today.

After describing the qualities of these accompaniments, the poem describes the stage on which Madhavi gave her performance. The text, now and then, says that the stage was built according to the *Sastra*, the text on *Natya*. What are the works on *Natya* on which Ilankovadikal based his description of the stage? Adiyarkkunallar, in the beginning of his commentary on the poem, gives a list of nine works on dance, drama, and music as authorities for the text of the *Silappadikaram*. None of these works are available now. Ilankovadikal, in his description of the stage, is very meagre, but still this little section of nineteen lines (95-113) is very valuable as being the only means of our having some clear view of the stage in ancient India.

Firstly the measuring pole is described. There is some difficulty in the interpretation of the text on the length of this pole. A good bamboo must be chosen and 24 *Virals*, i.e. *Angulas* must be taken as a unit for further measurement. An *Angula* is given as the measurement of the thumb of a *Mahapurusha*. Directly from *Angula* the text passes to a *Kol*, i.e. *Danda* and by itself the text here would mean that a *Kol* or *Danda* is 24 *Angulas*. In that case, the stage becomes very small. The text, however, contains nothing more. The commentary adds nothing more except giving a name *Muzham* i.e., *Hasta* for 24 *Angulas*. Neither the second commentary nor any of the treatises on *Natya Sastra* quoted by it add anything more. The scale of measurement given in Tamil from the small speck of dust called *Ter Tuhai* (Skr. *Rajas*) up to *Viral* or *Angula* corresponds to what Bharata has given in the same context in his *Natya*

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Sastra. But Bharata gives it thus: 24 *Angulas* (Tamil, *Viral*)=1 *Hasta* (Tamil, *Muzham*), and 4 *Hastas*=1 *Danda* (Tamil, *Kol*). In adopting this scale of Bharata, the dimensions of the stage in *Silappadikaram* become sufficiently enhanced. This problem was finally solved for me by Mahamahopadhyaya Swaminatha Aiyar. He said that the text of *Silappadikaram* gave the measurement of a *Hasta* or *Muzham* only, and that the *Kol* or *Danda*, which was very well known as 6 ft., i.e., 4 *Hastas*, was not described in the text. This interpretation solves the difficulty. Thus the scale of measurement given by *Silappadikaram* and all other Tamil works on *Natya* corresponds to that given by Bharata in Chapter II of his *Natya Sastra*: 24 *Angulas*=1 *Hasta*; 4 *Hastas*=1 *Danda*; *Hasta*=1½ ft; *Danda*=6 ft.

Then the *Silappadikaram* gives the dimensions of the stage. The length is 8 *Kols*; the breadth, 7 *Kols*; the height of the stage-platform is 1 *Kol*; and the height of the stage-space from the floor of the stage up to the beam is 4 *Kols*. That is, the stage is 48 ft. × 42 ft.; the height of the platform is 6 ft., and that of the stage-space, 24 ft. This stage then approaches the nature of the rectangular stage of Bharata, of the middle size, approximately.

The stage is given two doors. The commentator adds that one door is for entrance and one for exit. After the erection of the stage, it is said that the figures of the *Bhutas* for worship must be drawn on the floor of the stage. The commentary says that the *Bhutas* are the figures representing the four castes and that they are drawn on the floor and propitiated. The second commentary adds that further information of the painting of these four *Varna Bhutas*, of their anatomy, dress, decoration, etc., can be had in a further context in the section of the poem called *Azhar Padu Kadai*.

The lights are then spoken of. It is said that they must be so arranged as not to make the pillars cast shadows on the king and his party or the other spectators in the audience hall. The lights are said to be big and beautiful. The curtains are then described. The text mentions three

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curtains: *Oru Muha Ezhini*, *Poru Muha Ezhini*, and *Karanduvaral Ezhini*. The first-mentioned curtain is one which is pulled along to one side, the next is a double-curtain, cleft at the middle, the two bits shrinking separately at the two sides, enabling entrance. The last-mentioned curtain is one that rolls upwards and downwards. The first commentary gives some more details as regards these three curtains. The single curtain shrinking to one side is said to be fixed on the left side, the double cleft-curtain on the right side, and the rolling one in the front. Thus the right side having the double curtain, has the gate of entrance for the danseuse. The second commentator says that the rolling curtain is for occasions of *Akasa Charins*, those appearing in the sky, such as the Devas. These pertain to drama and not to dance. This mystifying reference, however, shows us that there are other texts which describe a stage completely from the point of view of not only dance, which is performed by one person, but from the point of view of drama also, which has many persons personating in it, and consequently needs greater equipment about the stage.

The last thing mentioned of the stage by the poem is the beautification of the stage. Bharata says that the stage and the audience hall must be lavishly decorated with wood-carvings and paintings. The *Silappadikaram* also says that the stage must have a painted canopy above, that it must have the appearance of a newly built one, and that hangings of pearl and other garlands must beautify it.

The text then passes on to the dancing, *Purva Ranga*, etc., with which we have nothing to do at present. In the above account we have a few details about the stage, its length, breadth, height, its two gates, three curtains, lighting, and decoration. Only the stage proper, as much as is enough for dance, is described, and not the theatre completely. In connection with lighting, there is just a passing mention of a portion of the audience hall accommodating the king, but of the audience hall itself nothing is spoken. In the stage itself we do not hear of the green-room, etc. But there is a small

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word in the text '*Etra*,' which the second commentator takes to refer to the other features of the complete theatre which, though not described by the text of the poem, he gives from the texts on *Natya*. Thus this small description of the bare stage must not be taken to mean that the stage of those times itself was not well-built or was crude, but it means only that, for his poem, the author had no necessity to describe more.

Among poems none else gives even this information. However, the idea of a well-built stage being a fact, there are sundry references to certain parts of it in some other poems also. Thus the *Jivaka Chintamani* says that the curtains are three and are called single, double, and single rolling. The *Manimekhalai* says that the single curtain should be glass-like. There is reference to stage and dance on it in the *Manimekhalai*, but we have no details of the stage architecture given there. These references are given as footnotes by M. M. Swaminatha Aiyar in his edition of the *Silappadikaram*.

Coming to the *Sastra*, treatises on dance, drama, and music, we have little of the vast *Natya* literature of Tamil now available. Three of them are said to have been secured by the editor of the *Silappadikaram*, M. M. Swaminatha Aiyar. The *Silappadikaram* itself now and then refers to the rules laid down in the treatises. The first commentator quotes many extracts in his commentary, but none with either the name of the author or of the work. Only one quotation has been given by him with the author's name and it is *Seyittriyana*r. The second commentator, a later writer who follows the first commentary, is ample in the information he gives. At the beginning of his commentary he gives a list of *Natya* and *Sangita* works upon which Ilankovadikal based his *Silappadikaram*, and another list on which he says he depends for his own commentary. The works thus mentioned as authorities for the *Silappadikaram* are *Peru Narai*, *Perunkuru*hu, *Pancha Bharatiam* of Deva Rishi Narada, (3 works on Music) *Bharatam*, *Ahattiyam* (Agastya's work), *Muruval*, *Sayantam* (Jayantam, named after Indra's son Jayanta, for whom it was



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written), *Guna Nool*, and *Seyittriyam*, named after its author, (6 works on dance and drama). Those given by the commentator Adiyarkkunallar as the authorities he used are thus given by him:—

*Isai Nunukkam* of Sikhandi, pupil of Agastya. This work was written for the education in music of Sara Kumaram, born of the half-divine Pandya of the second Sangam called Anakula, and the Apsaras Tilottama whom the king met while riding in the air.

*Indrakaliyam* of Yamalendra.

*Pancha Marabu* of Arivananar.

*Bharatha Senapatiyam* of Adivayilar.

*Madivananar Nataka Tamizh Nool* of Pandyan Madivananar, a Pandyan king of the last Sangam who was a recognised poet. This work is said to be distinguished prominently by treating of *Puhazh Kootthu* (literally, eulogistic dance to glorify the victor-king: *Vettriyal*) from the earlier works which treated of *Vasaik Kootthu* (literally, satyric dance with reference to the defeated king: *Poduviyal*). None of these works are available now. However, we have fragments of these quoted by Adiyarkkunallar in his commentary, and when one peruses this portion of his commentary, one sees clearly that, to a large extent, the Tamil Natya Sastra is not only based on the Sanskrit Natya literature but also that the former borrows freely from the latter.

On the subject of theatre-architecture, some fragments of these works are available to us in the quotations of Adiyarkkunallar. The works quoted by him in this section on stage-architecture are *Bharata Senapatiyam*, *Seyttriyam* (an older work, being given, as noted above, as an authority for *Silappadikaram* itself) and the work of Madivananar, the Pandyan king. Besides extracts from these three, there are other valuable quotations which are anonymous.

The Natya Sastra of Bharata, in its treatment of the theatre begins with the choosing of the ground itself, giving the qualities of the ground that should be chosen as the plot for the building of the theatre. It says that the ground must

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be even and firm, and the soil sweet in smell and taste. The same things are mentioned in a long quotation from smoe unknown work, given by Adiyarkkunallar. It says that the soil of the ground should be sweet in scent and taste, and free from pebbles. The ground must not be moist or swampy. One of the characteristics of good soil is that when a pit is dug, the mud dug out, on refilling the pit with it, must not remain as surplus. One must take care that he does not destroy for the sake of building a theatre such institutions of *Dharma*, like temples, monasteries, Brahmins' settlements and public wells. The most valuable part of this quotation is the locality it gives as the most proper place for the theatre. The theatre described by the *Silappadikaram* is a theatre in the Rajadhani or the Capital, and it is in the city and not in the palace. It is, however, patronised by the king. The use of the theatres is much spoilt by their locality. This quotation says that the theatre shall be built in the very centre of the city, facing one of the four main streets along which the car of the temple of that city runs:

*"Urin Naduvinadahi,*

*Ter odun veedihal edirmuhamahi."*

Another writer is quoted here, and the qualities of good soil and the evils resulting from the choosing of bad soil are rather elaborately spoken of by Adiyarkkunallar. Another anonymous quotation gives the scale of measurement referred to at the beginning.

Another valuable quotation is from Seyittriyanar, who is the only writer who gives slightly different dimensions for the stage. All the texts available give the same dimensions, and refer to the same details, two gates, three curtains, etc. Seyittriyanar, while not changing the length, breadth and height of the stage-platform, gives the height of the stage-space between the floor of the stage and the beam, not as 4 *kols* but as 3 *kols* :

*"Mukkol Tanum uyavum uritte."*

Another anonymous quotation here refers us to rules laid down by treatises in Sanskrit on the subject of the stage. Madi-

vananar and Bharata Senapatiyar are quoted on the curtains, that they are three in number.

We have already mentioned that Adiyarkkunallar gives information about the other parts of the theatre. No quotations are given by him as regards these. He himself says that the other parts of the theatre not mentioned in the *Silappadikaram* must be taken as understood. Those he thus mentions are :—

*Karandu Pokkidam*.—Place to retire into, or place on the sides into which, after acting, the actor passes. This place perhaps served not only as verandahs to retire into, but also as green-room.

*Kannular Kudijnaiippalli*.—Cloth tents housing the actors. These tents may suggest that the actors were travelling troupes, or that these tents were closely attached to the stage as substitutes for green-room.

*Mannar Mandarodirukkum Avai Arangam*.—The portion of the *sabha* or audience for the king and his party.

*Ivattraiccoozhnda Puvi Nirai Mandar*.—The audience-portion for the citizen-spectators. From this we see that the king sat with his attendants in the centre, and the other spectators, the chief citizens, sat round him in a semi-circle.

There is one more Tamil treatise on *Natya* to be dealt with. It is called the *Suddhanandaprakasam* and is with M. M. Swaminatha Aiyar. It seems to be later than all the works referred to above. On the dimensions of the stage, it not only follows but reproduces also the words of the *Silappadikaram*. Extracts from this work are given by the Editor as footnotes. From these extracts we see that this work draws most upon the Sanskrit treatises. On the subject of stage-building, two extracts from it are given by the Editor. These two extracts show the indebtedness of the work to the *Silappadikaram* and the Sanskrit *Natya* literature. Bharata says that the erection of the stage must be attended with auspicious ceremonies, feasting, music, and dance. The *Suddhanandaprakasam* also says that *Adal*, *Padal*, *Kottu* and *Pani* must mark the construction of the theatre.

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The extract further directs the stage-builder to avoid places near temples, monasteries, birds' nests, ant-hills and not to destroy these for building the theatre. Similarly it says that proximity to the quarters of elephants, the horse-stables, the battle-field and the hamlet of the low people must be avoided. In the second extract, the work says that besides the *Varna Bhutas* drawn on the floor of the stage for worship, there must be established on the stage the deity called *Nandin*. This is clearly due to Sanskrit influence, *Nandin* being one of the heads in the Sanskrit Natya pantheon. The extract further says that the theatre must be decorated with carvings of animals and birds.

There is a treatise in palm-leaf manuscript in the Adyar Mss. Library called *Sangita Sangraha Chintamani* by one Appalacharya of Srimushnam village, which is in South Arcot district. The work is in Sanskrit and Tamil; there are verses written in ungrammatical Sanskrit and upon them long comments are made in colloquial Tamil. The treatise is not very recent.

One of the chapters of this work treats of Natya, in connection with which the erection of a theatre is described. I have got a copy of this chapter made for me and the following account of the stage is given in it. Temples, monasteries, and Brahmin settlements should be avoided; and a good place for a theatre must be chosen within a park or *an island in the midst of a tank*. Such soil as is rocky or is full of ash, bones, and pebbles, must be avoided. The best soil is that in which, when a pit is dug and mud dug out is again put into the pit, we have some more mud left out; when there is no mud left out, the soil is not bad; but when the mud is insufficient to fill the pit, the soil is bad. The soil of bad taste should be avoided. The text gives the evil results of various bad tastes of soils.

The treatise gives two types of stages, one measuring 64×32 *Karas* or *Hastas* or *Muzhams* and the other 32×16. Thus, in Bharata's words, both the types are by shape *Vikrishtha*; and by size the former is *Jyeshtha* than the

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latter which is smaller. Sixteen pillars are then mentioned, after the erection of which *Vastupuja* is to be done. The decoration of the house and the arrangement of the king's seat in the audience are then described. In this section the text quotes a Sanskrit treatise called *Nritta Ratnakaram*. From the above we see the similarities of details given in this work, which bases itself on the Sanskrit Natya literature, to those found in the Tamil texts above dealt with.

Thus this survey of the fragments of the Tamil Natya literature not only proves largely the subject on hand, *viz.*, the existence of well-built theatres in ancient India, but incidentally proves the fundamental unity that underlies Indian literature and art, the indebtedness of all vernaculars to Sanskrit, and the close way in which provincial literature and art are knit to Sanskrit, the Himalayan source of all the currents.

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## Hindu Theatre

Commenting on an article of Mr. Mankad on Hindu Theatre (*IHQ.*, VIII, 3) Mr. Manomohan Ghosh says in *IHQ.*, IX, 2 (pp. 591-4) that there did not exist two different parts of the stage called Raṅga Śirṣa and Raṅga Pīṭha. He cites four texts of Bharata himself to prove that one and the same part of the stage was referred to by the two different names. Mr. Ghosh proposes to rely solely on the text of Bharata, setting aside the rather corrupt text of the *Abhinava Bhāratī*.

If *Abhinava Bhāratī* confuses, I think, the text of Bharata, with the various readings, confuses us as much. The text is not explicit on many points. The two names Raṅga Pīṭha and Raṅga Śirṣa are often used without any express statement that the two terms denote the same place. Nor are we able to see the reason why the same place was known by two different names. Let us first take the aid of the valuable commentary of Abhinava which, I think, cannot be set aside, even for the present, as Mr. Ghosh does. At least to one who wants to consult Abhinava also, it is plain that Raṅga Pīṭha and Raṅga Śirṣa are two different places.

1. On p. 57 (Gaek. edn.) Abhinava says that the Raṅga Śīrṣa is the place where the actors remain *i.e.*, after make-up and before taking part in action. Such a place can never be the place where the drama is enacted. A separate place for enacting drama is therefore necessary.

2. On p. 63 Abhinava says that the Raṅga Śīrṣa is to be constructed for the purpose of the actors taking rest, for keeping those who are to appear and for the sake of beauty. If Raṅga Śīrṣa is for such purposes, there must be another place for showing the acting of the drama and that place is the Raṅga Pīṭha.

3. It is clear from the following passage that Abhinava held the two as different.

“रङ्गपीठस्य यदुपरि शिरोरूपमित्यर्थः । तथा च रङ्गपीठापेक्षया रङ्गशिरः उन्नतं वक्ष्यते ।” (p. 69, Gaek. edn.)

4. The passage in the text of the Nāṭya Sāstra itself to which Abhinava refers in the above quoted passage is

समुन्नतं समं चैव रङ्गशीर्षं तु कारयेत् ।

विकृष्टे तून्नतं कार्यं चतुरस्रे समं तथा ॥ (II., 101.)

The commentary says: समुन्नतमिति-रङ्गपीठापेक्षया । (p. 70.)

5. On the same page Abhinava gives the following Avatārikā to NS., II. 102—

अथ रङ्गपीठरङ्गशिरसोः वक्तव्यशेषं निरूपयति—अष्टहस्तं त्विति ।

Coming to the text of Bharata himself, we notice that chap. II is devoted to a regular description of the theatre and in chap. I, there is mention of various parts of the theatre in connection with the description of the deities which protect the several parts of the house. In 1,85 (Gaek. edn.) a Vedikā is mentioned, and Śālā-halls and numerous other adjacent structures are also referred to by the words सर्ववेश्मसु and द्वारशाला (Śls. 86-87). Where are these two to be located? Chap. II does not speak of any such halls. The Vedikā is, however, mentioned twice in chap. II also, in śls. 102 and 103. What is this Vedikā? It must surely mean a raised place. This, I think, is identical with the Raṅga Śīrṣa and if it is so, we have it mentioned even in chap. I, as a place different from Raṅga Pīṭha which is also mentioned there. The Vedikā is presided over by God Fire



(I, 85) and the Raṅga Pīṭha by Brahmā himself—(I, 94). On pp. 57 and 59 Abhinava explains the Raṅga Śīrṣa as a raised portion which will resemble the head of a person lying down on his back. If we imagine the whole Prekṣāgrha (house) as a man lying down on his back, the audience hall will be the portion below his waist; the Raṅga Pīṭha will be his chest and the Raṅga Śīrṣa will be his head (Śīrṣa) and here was Pujā and Bali done during the Purva Raṅga; hence its other name is Veditā.

VS., II. 36-37 first give 64 Hastas, then a halving of this portion, a second halving of hind-half of the two, and then a third dividing of one of these two halves into two halves. In II. 20, the other measurement of 32 Hastas is supplied. First we get two halves  $32 \times 32$ ; the hind-half is divided into two parts of  $16 \times 32$  H. I take the front-half of these two measuring  $16 \times 32$  as the portion asked to be again halved into two parts,  $8 \times 32$ . In the front portion  $8 \times 32$ , there are to be two squares of 8 H. at both ends as Mattavāraṇīs and between the two Mattavāraṇīs is the portion  $8 \times 16$  which is the Raṅga Pīṭha. In the second bit measuring  $8 \times 32$ , the Raṅga Śīrṣa is constructed in the very centre measuring  $8 \times 8$ , leaving on both sides two spaces of  $8 \times 12$  H. Thus the Raṅga Śīrṣa will rise just at the centre, at the back, of the Raṅga Pīṭha looking like its head. The portion at the back of these two, measuring  $16 \times 32$ , is the Greenroom. The front half  $32 \times 32$  is the audience hall. This is how I understand the text of Bharata and how Miss Ketkar also has explained in a very elaborate Marathi exposition of hers of the *Nāṭya Śāstra* of Bharata. Mr. Ghosh has not got two places called Raṅga Śīrṣa and Raṅga Pīṭha and he assigns more space to the audience hall. He also reduces considerably the space of the Greenroom. This view of mine was expressed in an article on 'Theatre-Architecture in Ancient India' in the Nov-Dec., 1931 issue of the *Trivenī*, Madras, along with a diagram of the Vikṛṣṭa type. Mr. Mankad, in a footnote to his article on 'Hindu Theatre' refers to it. His interpretation of Bharata's text agrees with mine, except in the dimension of the Raṅga Śīrṣa. I hold it to be an eight Hastas square whereas he gives it as the whole space of  $8 \times 32$ . He says regarding my view of the Raṅga Śīrṣa that though it is highly plausible,

it is not borne out by the text. When texts are vague, meagre and bewildering, we have got to use our imagination. If my view is plausible, I think, it can be accepted. Abhinava has said on p. 57 that the Raṅga Śirṣa is eight Hastas. He has not said whether it is length or breadth. On p. 58, the Raṅga Pīṭha is described as  $8 \times 16$ ; and as distinguished from the broader Raṅga Pīṭha, the Raṅga Śirṣa as likened to a Śirṣa or 'head' and therefore I took the Raṅga Śirṣa as an eight Hastas square. It was not possible to reconcile the metaphor of Śirṣa and the markedness of the place and the measurement,  $8 \times 32$ .

Regarding the curtain also with which Dr. A. K. Coomaraswamy's note on Mr. Mankad's article on Hindu Theatre deals, Abhinava has got to say something definite. In this connection also he mentions the Śirṣa and the Pīṭha separately and informs us that between these two was hanging a curtain. There was not only an entrance by Apatīkṣepa, 'with a toss of the curtain', but there seems to have been a यवनिका-अपसरण, removal of the curtain also. For says Abhinava on p. 212 (Gaek. edn.).

“तत्र यवनिका रङ्गपीठतच्छिरसोर्मध्ये । तस्या अन्तरागतैः प्रयोक्तृभिर्नटैः

प्राधान्यात् यदि वा वैणिकादिभिरेव प्रयोक्तृभिः प्रयोज्यानि प्रत्याहारादीनि ; गीतकपिण्ड्या दीनि तु यवनिकायामपसारितायां ।

V. RAGHAVAN